

**WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?**  
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Tisha B'av (the Ninth day of Av), is the saddest day in the Jewish Calendar. This year 5782 (2022), we observe the fast day of Tisha B'av (nidche\*) starting from Motzei Shabbat after nightfall, August 6, until nightfall on Sunday, August 7.

\*(nidche) - postponed to the next day because one may not fast on Shabbat.

"On the Ninth of Av it was decreed on our fathers that they would not enter the Land (of Eretz Yisroel) [Bamidbar 14], the Temple was destroyed [both] the first time and the second time, Beitar (the stronghold of the Bar Kochba rebellion) was captured, and the city (of Yerushalayim) was plowed under."

Talmud Taanit 26b

**On Tisha B'av five tragedies happened to the Jewish people:**

Hashem decreed that all the Jews who were saved from the Egyptian bondage will die out in the Midbar (desert) and be deprived from entering Eretz Yisroel because of the sin of the meraglim (spies). (Bamidbar, Parashat Sh'lach, 14:26-38).

The first Bait Hamikdash, built by King Solomon, was destroyed on Tisha B'av by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE.

The second Bait Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av by Titus and his Roman soldiers in 70 CE. In 135 CE, during the time of Rabbi Akiva, the Romans captured the fortress city of Beitar, the last stronghold of the leaders of the Bar Kochba revolt, and Bar Kochba along with tens of thousands of Jews were massacred.

Exactly a year later, the Roman Emperor Hadrian ordered the wicked Turnus Rufus to plow up the city of Yerushalayim, so that there should be no memory of the holy city. He then established a heathen temple on the site of the Bait Hamikdash and rebuilt Yerushalayim as a pagan city, renamed Aelia Capitolina, which the Jews were forbidden to enter.

Our Sages established this day, Tisha B'av, as a fast day; a day of sorrow when we commemorate the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Bait Hamikdash. We must try to feel the gravity of the loss of the Bait Hamikdash and grieve the fact that we are still in exile today. We also remember all other tragedies that befell the Jewish people.

**WHAT ELSE HAPPENED ON TISHA B'AV?**

Several other tragedies occurred on this same black day. The anti-Jewish riots and the mass suicide of the Jews of York, England in 1190. On this day in 1290, King Edward I signed the edict compelling the Jews to leave England. In 1492, by order of the Spanish inquisition under Ferdinand and Isabella, the expulsion of 200,000 Jews from Spain, after centuries of cultural and spiritual growth, occurred on this date. The First World War broke out on Tisha B'av. Fifteen years later, on this very same date, the Arabs began their riots in the city of Yerushalayim, which

**WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?**  
[Village of Hope & justice Ministry Admin Office](#)

resulted in great tragedy, including the Jewish massacre in Chevron (Hebron). Deportation of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto began on this day in 1942.

## **LAWS OF TISHA B'AV**

Some Laws of Tisha B'av

**NOTE:** There are many complex laws regarding Tisha B'av, and a competent authority should be consulted with any questions. The fast begins just before sundown, until the following evening, as on Yom Kippur, differentiating it from other fasts that begin at sunrise. The rules for observing Tisha B'av are similar to those of Yom Kippur and the restrictions are more severe than on any other fast day.

On Tisha B'av, the following acts are forbidden:

Eating and drinking, Bathing or washing, Anointing (using oil or perfume), Marital relations, Wearing leather shoes, Learning Torah (with certain exceptions) and Giving "Shalom."

### **Other prohibitions: Eating and Drinking**

Boys and girls over Bar/Bat Mitzvah are required to fast the entire day. Boys under 13 years of age and girls under 12 need not fast the entire day and there are various opinions as to whether they should fast part of the day.

Pregnant and nursing women are required to fast on Tisha B'av. If a pregnant or nursing woman feels that fasting may have an ill effect on her, a rabbi should be consulted. A small headache or minor discomfort is no reason not to fast.

A woman during the first seven days after childbirth may not fast on Tisha B'Av. During the first thirty days after childbirth, she need not fast.

Those who are permitted to eat on Tisha B'av should not indulge or eat more than necessary to sustain their health. Also, those who are eating on Tisha B'av should do so in private.

There are various opinions about smoking on Tisha B'av. It is accepted practice that those who smoke do so ONLY after midday, in private. (There are other opinions, who forbid even this; there are others who say smoking is permitted even before midday, and publicly.)

You may wash your mouth with water only if not doing so would cause great distress. Mouthwash on Tisha B'av is a no-no. (On other fast days, rinsing with water is permissible if not doing so would cause even a little discomfort). It is important to make sure that you do not swallow any water during rinsing and it is therefore recommended that you rinse while bending over.

Swallowing capsules, bitter medicines or bitter liquids without water is permissible.

## **Bathing or Washing**

On Tisha B'av, bathing or washing any part of the body for pleasure, even the hands or face is prohibited. One may not even place one's finger in water, cold or warm.

If you must wash your hands or any other part of your body because they are dirty or stained, you may wash only that part.

Washing may be done in the following circumstances, but only until the joints at the end of the fingers:

Upon arising in the morning.

Upon leaving the bathroom.

Before Davening (praying).

Upon touching covered portions of the body.

(One may, after drying their hands, pass the moist hands over their eyes. This may be done only if the hands are not moist enough to wet another object. If there is crust around your eyes, you may wash it off).

You may not place a container of cool water against your face in order to cool off. However, you may place a cool empty vessel, or a cool fruit, etc., against your face.

## **Anointing**

On Tisha B'av you may not apply any type of soap, body oil, perfume, hair tonic, cream, etc. It makes no difference if the application is solid or liquid.

The use of deodorant, however, is permitted (and recommended).

Anointing for medical purposes is permitted. If in doubt, a rabbi should be consulted.

## **Wearing Shoes**

We are not allowed to wear shoes made of leather on Tisha B'av, even if it is only partially of leather. Shoes made of cloth, rubber, plastic and wood are permitted. You may wear leather shoes for medical reasons (i.e. where other permissible shoes would not be adequate). If in doubt, a rabbi should be consulted.

## **Learning Torah**

This prohibition is more stringent than on Yom Kippur. Since learning Torah is considered Simcha (joy), Torah study, with the exception of those portions concerning mourning, or the destruction of the Bait Hamikdash, is forbidden on Tishah B'av.

**WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?**  
[Village of Hope & justice Ministry Admin Office](#)

The following topics may be studied on Tisha B'av:

- 1) Iyov (Book of Job).
- 2) Those parts of Nevi'im (prophets) that discuss tragedies of the Jews.
- 3) Eichah (Book of Lamentations).
- 4) Perek Eilu Megalchin (Chap. III, Tractate Moed Katan).
- 5) The Story of Kamtzah Bar Kamtzah (Tractate Gittin 55b-58a).
- 6) Sanhedrin 104 a, b.
- 7) Laws of Tisha B'Av.

A Baal Koreh may prepare the reading for Tisha B'Av.

#### Giving Shalom

It is prohibited to greet someone on Tisha B'Av. It is preferable to refrain from any type of greeting, including "hello" or "good morning," as well as a greeting that includes "Shalom."

If someone does greet you on Tisha B'Av you should answer in a low voice, to indicate that Shealas Shalom (greeting) is forbidden and not to arouse resentment.

#### Other Prohibitions on Tisha B'Av

Giving gifts is prohibited on Tisha B'Av, unless the gift can be considered in the category of Tzedaka (charity).

Sitting on a chair or an object 3 tefachim (approximately 12" ) or higher is forbidden until midday Tisha B'Av beginning at Mincha.

It is forbidden to do any act or engage in any activity that would distract you from the required attitude or mourning on Tisha B'Av. Therefore, it is forbidden to take a pleasure walk or trip on Tisha B'Av. Any form of frivolity or cheerfulness is forbidden.

Another thing that is prohibited because it distracts from the "spirit of the fast" is work or business. Any work - skilled or unskilled that takes time should be postponed until after midday. Work that does not take time, such as tying a shoe or turning on lights, may be done any time on Tisha B'Av.

Housework, if possible, should be postponed until after Tisha B'Av. If this is not feasible, the work should be done after midday.

**WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?**  
[Village of Hope & justice Ministry Admin Office](#)

You should try to avoid any business transactions during the entire day of Tisha B'Av. If this is not possible, try to put off working at least until midday.

One who works on Tisha B'Av where prohibited, "will not see a blessing from that work."

When Tisha B'Av falls on a Shabbat or Sunday

When Tisha B'Av falls on a Shabbat, the fast day is postponed till Sunday.

We do not have a Seudah HaMafseket (see below). We do not say the customary Havdalah at the end of Shabbat. On Motzoei Shabbat after nightfall, before the reading of Megilat Eichah, the Bracha - Borei Me'Orei Ho'aish is said upon seeing candlelight. Havdalah is recited Sunday evening, after the Tisha B'Av fast is over.

**NOTE:** The same rules apply when Tisha B'Av falls on a Sunday. We do NOT have a Seudah HaMafseket (see below).

### **HOW DO WE OBSERVE THE DAY?**

Like Yom Kippur, the afternoon Mincha service is said early in the day. It is customary to eat a meal before Mincha. This meal has no restrictions. It is customary to eat well at this meal in preparation for the fast, but care must be taken not to overeat so that one can eat the Seuda HaMafseket comfortably.

#### **Seuda HaMafseket (Separating Meal)**

The observance of Tisha B'Av begins with the Seuda HaMafseket, a last meal eaten prior to sunset. It is forbidden to eat more than one cooked food at this meal. (Cooked also meaning roasted, fried, or pickled.) Meat, wine and fish are forbidden, as are intoxicating drinks. Unlike the elaborate meal we eat before Yom Kippur, this meal, customarily consists of bread dipped in ashes, a cold hard-boiled egg and water. It is eaten alone, while seated on the floor or on a low stool. One should say, "This is the Tisha B'Av meal."

In the evening, the synagogues lights are dimmed, and candles are lit. Leather shoes are removed before the Maariv (evening) services. The Aron HaChodesh (Holy Ark) is draped in black (in some synagogues the curtain is removed). Crowns with tinkling bells are removed from Torah scrolls. We sit on low stools or on the floor as Maariv is recited in a subdued tone and afterwards we read dolefully from Megillat Eichah followed by a few special mournful dirges called Kinnot.

In the morning, the saddest part of the day, the Tallit (prayer shawl) and Tefillin (phylacteries) are not worn during Shacharit (morning services), because they are called "Pe-ar (ornaments)." Rather they are worn during Mincha instead. After the main part of the Shacharit morning service, and after the Torah reading, a large number of Kinnot are recited recalling many of the tragic events in Jewish history. In some communities, Eichah is recited again.

## WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?

[Village of Hope & justice Ministry Admin Office](#)

The afternoon Mincha service is the same as on other fast days, except that we put on the Tallit and Tefillin we didn't wear in the morning. Sitting on chairs is now permitted and the intensity of the grief may be reduced. A special prayer is added to the blessing of Boneh (builder of) Yerushalayim during the Sh'mone Esrei (Amidah).

Tisha B'Av ends at nightfall sometime after sundown. Although the fast ends that night, it is proper not to eat meat, shave, wash clothes or bathe until noon the following day. This is because the Bait Hamikdash continued to burn into the tenth day. This restriction does not apply when Tisha B'Av falls on a Shabbat and the fast day was postponed till Sunday, or when Tisha B'Av falls on a Thursday.

Our sages teach us that "Whoever mourns over Yerushalayim is deserving to witness her joy." (Talmud Taanit 30b). As it is written in Isaiah (Chapter 66, verse 10), "rejoice greatly with her, all who mourn her."

### OUR LEGACY:

**ERETZ YISROEL & YERUSHALAYIM** The city of Yerushalayim was first sanctified by our forefather Avraham, when he was ready to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak, on Har HaMoriya. (Mt. Moriah). Hashem chose the Jewish people, the children of Avraham, as his Am Haniv'char, - His chosen people. He chose Eretz Yisrael as the most holy land and Yerushalayim as the holiest of cities, as it is stated - "Ki vachar Hashem B'Zion - For Hashem has chosen Zion)." (Psalms 132:13)

The Talmud explicitly states: "He who eats and drinks on the 9th of Av will not live to see the crowning glory of Yerushalayim." The value of fasting lies not only in remembering the past and applying its lessons to the present, but also in recognizing the unity of our people, the root of its existence and the prophetic destiny which still awaits fulfillment.

Even though Yerushalayim is now in the hands of the Jewish people, (and for how long?) Jews all over the world gather in their synagogues, fasting from sunset to sunset. We sit on low stools or on the floor as mourners, wearing slippers instead of leather shoes. Under dim lights or by candlelight we read from Eichah followed by Kinnot.

In Yerushalayim, Jews from throughout the land of Eretz Yisroel flock by the thousands to the Kotel Hama'aravi (the Western Wall), the last remnant of the Bait Hamikdash, where many stay all night reading Kinnot by the light of the moon.

These Kinnot prayers remind us of the destruction, but at the same time we pray for that great day when the saddest day of the year will turn into a Yom Tov (holiday) and peace shall reign throughout the world. We also pray for that time when in the words of the Prophet Zacharia, "The fast day of the fifth month (Tisha B'av) will yet become for the household of Israel a day of rejoicing and of happiness."(Zecharia 8:19).

## **WHAT IS TISHA B'AV?**

[Village of Hope & justice Ministry Admin Office](#)

Until such days will come, we continue to fast on Tisha B'Av. The Chazzan recites Eichah in a special melody, which seems to emanate from the very heart of the Jewish people.

He reads "Kumi, roni balayla. - Arise, cry out at night, in the beginning of the watches."

"Shifchi Kamayim Libaych, Nochach Pnei Hashem. - Pour out your heart like water, in the Presence of Hashem."

"Lift up your hands to Him for the life of your young children, who swoon from hunger at every street corner." (Eicha 2:19)

It is by voluntarily inflicting ourselves on Tisha B'av that we identify with the totality of Jewish history; just as "By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion." (Psalms 137:1). Throughout history there have always been, and tragically probably always will be, Jews persecuted because of their faith. By keeping alive these bitter memories of our exile, and teaching them to our children, we hope both to prevent their recurrence and to recognize the miraculous continuity of our existence.

## **SHABBAT NACHAMU**

The Shabbat after Tisha B'av is called Shabbat Nachamu (Shabbat of comfort), for the Haftorah which begins with the words: "Nachamu, Nachamu Ami - Be comforted, be comforted, my people..." (Yeshayahu 40). In this chapter, the Navi (prophet) describes the Ultimate Redemption (Mashiach) which we have yet to experience.

There are seven weeks from Tisha B'av until Rosh Hashanah. This period is called, "Shiva D'nechemta" - "Seven weeks of comfort." In contrast to the three weeks before Tisha B'av in which we read prophesies of punishment, the Haftorah for each of these seven weeks consists of prophesies which comfort and bring the message of hope to the Jewish people.

When Mashiach will return, Tisha B'av will turn into a day full of "gladness and cheerful feasts." (Zecharia 8:19). May this joyful day come speedily in our time.

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